

Friday, July 9, 2021

Sustainable Planning and Community Development
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC V8W 1P6

Re: 235 Russell Street, Victoria - Development Permit Application with Variance

Letter to the Mayor and Council,



dHKarchitects

Victoria

977 Fort Street V8V 3K3

T +1 250-658-3367

Nanaimo

102-5190 Dublin Way V9T 2K8

T +1 250-585-5810

mail@dhk.ca

www.dhk.ca

Description of Proposal

The proposal for 235 Russell Street is to develop the property within the existing zone of M1 Limited Light Industrial District. By maintaining a diversity of employment lands and uses, the proposal meets the goals and objectives of Victoria's Official Community Plan (OCP). Further, the proposal is consistent with the Built Form described in the OCP.

The proposal is for three levels of warehouse space over parking and service areas at grade. The parking is behind the service areas and, thus, screened from the street. With one exception, the proposal meets all requirements of the existing zone. The requested variance is to waive the requirement for a loading space as described in the zone. Not only do we have no need for a loading space of this size, but to incorporate it into the building is aesthetically and functionally detrimental to the proposal. Such a loading space would seem more appropriate for far larger sites.

Project Benefits and Amenities

Project benefits for this development will include an increase in light industrial space within the City of Victoria. Not only will jobs be created in the short-term during planning and construction, but the facility will generate considerable long-term employment. Given the increase in property value associated with the transformation from an empty lot to a functioning warehouse, a considerable tax benefit to the City will also occur in the form of increased property taxes. The building proposed for 235 Russell is a welcome addition to the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood

235 Russell Street is located mid-block on the east side of Russell Street, south of the E&N railway. Adjacent to the north, south and west are industrial properties zoned as either M1 or M2 industrial. The adjacent properties are currently used for industrial purposes. The proposed development is in keeping with the immediate context.

Design and Development Permit Guidelines

235 Russell Street is within Development Permit Area 13 - Core Songhees and is within the western boundary of the neighbourhood where it transitions to the eastern boundary of Esquimalt. There is also a transition of uses in this zone with a predominantly commercial and industrial zone melding with low and medium density residential.

The primary objectives identified for this area in the Neighbourhood Plan and the Development Permit Area guidelines include the revitalization of sites to increase the vibrancy and strengthen the commercial viability while achieving a high level of architectural design that is reflective of the local context and industrial roots.

Our proposal meets all of these objectives. The building has a well-proportioned and articulated façade facing Russell Street that utilizes a varied patterning of coloured metal panel cladding and punched window openings with industrial-style mullioned windows on an exposed concrete base. Green-screen lattice work is introduced on the NW and SW corners to provide opportunity for plantings to climb the building corners and soften the edges.

The side elevations are constructed of a smooth-face masonry that will be painted to provide a primary water seal for the building. On the north face, as seen from Esquimalt Road, there will be opportunity to create a wall mural in collaboration with local artists. The south wall will be painted and both walls will have the green-screen plantings on their western ends.

The street level is enlivened by the glassy entrance, metalwork of the parking entrance and service gates, and it will be well lit at night by soffit lighting. The exposed concrete surfaces will be protected with an anti-graffiti coating so it will be possible to maintain the appearance of the building over time.

The project was extremely well received by Advisory Design Panel (ADP) which provided a short list of constructive criticisms. All of ADP's suggestions have been adopted and we thank them for improving the project. Staff have also been very constructive and collaborative. We thank them for their input. We believe the building meets all of the guidelines expressed in the policy documents and will be a vibrant addition to the neighbourhood.



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Transportation

235 Russell Street is located just off the arterial of Esquimalt Road. The project meets the zoning parking requirements and the current Zoning Bylaw Schedule C – Off-Street Parking requirements for bicycles. Less than one block to the north are bike lanes. Bicycle facilities such as showers and lockers will be provided for workers. Bicycle parking will be located within a safe and secure facility onsite and be easily accessible. It should be noted that the short-term bicycle parking is located within the secure premises. We understand that staff generally prefer short-term bicycle parking be unsecured, outside the premises. Not only is this impossible physically, but also problematic functionally. The zone's front yard setback requirement encourages limited space in front of the building. There is no space for bike racks in front of the building. Functionally, we believe bicyclists will be more comfortable having bicycles within the secure premises. Due to security measures, this will always be possible. It is anticipated the premises will be secured at all times. That is, those attending the site regularly (e.g., staff) will have the ability to access via key/fob. Guests will need to be met at the front and escorted onto the premises and, thus, all bicycles will be brought within the secure facility. As such, we believe the location of the bicycle parking within the secure premises is preferred. The increased bicycle parking will encourage the use of the existing and future network of greenways.

As described above, a variance to eliminate the requirement for a loading space is requested. The loading space is unnecessary. Given the size of the site and the abundance of onsite parking, movement of items to and from the building is easily handled by the proposed design. Any deliveries to-and-from the facility will be via the secure elevator lobby within the parking level. Deliveries will be infrequent and small and handled by standard vehicles. In the extremely unlikely event of a sizeable delivery needing a larger space, the property adjacent to the north has three loading docks. One of these docks is at the south end of that property (i.e., adjacent to the subject property) and is accessed from Russell street, directly north of the subject property access. That is, however unlikely, a delivery via an oversized vehicle could be received by the adjacent property. This variance was intentionally brought to the forefront of the ADP meeting for their comment. Agreement and support for the variance were provided by ADP.

Heritage

There are no existing buildings on the site. It is a paved and fenced empty lot.

Green Building Features

235 Russell will be constructed of high-quality and durable building materials to ensure it will be a long-lasting building capable of adaptive re-use. The building will be designed to the requirements of the Step-Code and will utilize high standards of thermal performance, coupled with low power consumption equipment for space heating and cooling loads, water heating, and electrical fixtures throughout. Plumbing fixtures will all be low-flow consumption models.

Infrastructure

Current Infrastructure is capable of supporting the proposed use. Frontage improvements (curb, gutter, and sidewalk) will be completed as required by the City of Victoria.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this design proposal for your review and consideration of Development Permit approval.



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Sincerely,

dHKarchitects

Charles Kierulf architect AIBC MRAIC

Managing Principal